



Congressman Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan

Before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

2023 Member Day Testimony

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2167 Rayburn House Office Building

Thank you, Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and Members of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, for the invitation to submit testimony as you develop a bill to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration's funding and program authorities beyond Fiscal Year 2023.

I request that you consider including my district, the Northern Mariana Islands, among the locations eligible to participate in the Department of Transportation's Essential Air Service (EAS) program. Adding the Northern Mariana Islands to Alaska and Hawaii among the locations exempt from EAS requirements would help ensure scheduled air service is always available to residents and visitors of the Marianas.

Air service is vital and the only practical means of transportation between the islands of the Marianas. Commuter air service can, however, be unreliable, and fare prices have increased significantly in recent years. One carrier has been providing air service between the three Marianas islands – Tinian, Rota, and Saipan – and to Guam for over a decade. However, in December 2021, the carrier abruptly suspended all air service for over a week and did not resume scheduled service for three weeks due to disputes over fees with the local port authority.

These actions prompted the former Marianas governor to use American Rescue Plan Act funds to have a second air carrier set up shop in the Marianas to provide partially subsidized commuter air service between the islands. However, when the new administration took office in January, the use of Rescue Act funds was questioned and subsequently halted, causing the second carrier to shut down operations and close business. These events caused a rapid increase in inter-island airfare rates that have remained historically high.

Although communities in the Northern Marianas were originally eligible for EAS, none of our airports were receiving EAS subsidies between September 30, 2010, and September 30, 2011, and therefore became ineligible when the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012

(Public Law No: 112-95) was enacted, changing the definition of “eligible place” for receiving EAS.

To ensure that communities in the Marianas will always have at least a minimal level of scheduled air service, EAS eligibility must be amended. This change will not automatically place Marianas airports in the program, but it will ensure that EAS assistance is available if ever needed.

I respectfully request that the Northern Marinas Islands be included in the exemption to EAS requirements, along with Alaska and Hawaii. Legislative text effectuating this change is attached for reference.

I thank the Committee for its consideration of this proposal for inclusion in the Federal Aviation Administration Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024.